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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ES](#)  
SUBJECT: ZABLAH STILL READY TO RUN; WAITING ON CD, FDR AND  
PDC

REF: SAN SALVADOR 260

Classified By: The Ambassador for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Arturo Zablah told PolCouns a coalition between CD, PDC, and FDR could be formed as soon as March 5. Assuming an agreement is reached, Zablah would announce his candidacy for president with the backing of the coalition and would seek an outsider as his running mate. He said his overriding goal was to establish in voters' minds the viability of a non-FMLN alternative to ARENA. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Arturo Zablah told PolCouns March 3 that talks between PDC, FDR, and CD were continuing more quickly than he had anticipated and were cordial. The aim, Zablah said, was to create an alliance for municipal, legislative, and presidential elections with exceptions in a handful of municipalities. Zablah was awaiting a delegation from CD that had sought an urgent meeting that day (he joked that he was unsure if that was good or bad) and expected -- if all went well -- the three parties to reach and sign an agreement on Wednesday, March 5. He said this could slip to later in the week. The agreement would name a four- or five-member coordinating board to manage the coalition, though Zablah acknowledged it would be difficult to keep all three parties in line for an entire legislative term. Zablah said Salvador Samayoa and Roberto Rubio were likely members. If agreement is reached, Zablah will join the meeting and announce his intention to run as the coalition's candidate. Zablah said the agreement was for him to find an outsider (i.e., non-CD, FDR, or PDC) as a running mate.

¶3. (C) Zablah said he understood the FMLN was displeased with his possible candidacy because they see themselves as the main victims. The FMLN believes Funes can win the presidency in the first round, but fears that a Zablah run will precipitate a second round where all bets are off. He said he was receiving quiet messages of support from a number of disenchanted ARENA members, including from ANEP (the Salvadoran business association) and other business interests who are upset with ARENA's candidate selection process. He said publisher Boris Esersky (protect) had sought a meeting with President Saca in recent months in order to urge that ARENA not kill off this third option at birth, not see Zablah and others as enemies, and to encourage ARENA to allow a non-FMLN third option to emerge in order to provide the prospect of a pro-system alternative to ARENA. Zablah said that to his knowledge such a meeting never happened.

¶4. (C) Zablah said he was not running because he expected to win the presidency, though he admitted he enjoyed being "in the game." His aim, he said, is to run a strong enough campaign that Salvadoran voters realize there is a third option between ARENA and the FMLN and establish a third, centrist option to the left of ARENA that doesn't have the FMLN's baggage. At 53 years old, he said he felt that this was the right moment to make this sort of run.

15. (C) Comment: Zablah has clear goals for a presidential run and does not expect he would become El Salvador's president, at least not in 2009. While breaking up the long-established bipolar system dominated by ARENA and the FMLN seems like a long shot, if Zablah and the PDC-FDR-CD coalition could precipitate an FMLN loss and establish themselves as a credible centrist alternative, the long-term ramifications for El Salvador would be significant.

GLAZER